THE ESCAPE

LITTLE ROCK ATARI ADDICTS

An Independent ATARI Computer User Group

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MONTHLY MEETING INFORMATION

The monthly meetings of THE LITTLE ROCK ATARI ADDICTS are open to the public and are held the third Saturday of each month from 6 P.M. until 10 P.M. The meeting place is the Bridge House, located at the corner of Hawthorne and Durwood streets in Little Rock.

The ST-SIG (Special Interest Group) meeting starts promptly at 6 P.M. at the Bridge House in Little Rock. The XL/XE SIG meeting starts promptly at 7 P.M. (immediately after the ST-SIG Group).

THE LITTLE ROCK ATARI ADDICTS is dedicated to making Atari personal computers, software and peripherals more productive, useful, and fun for their owners.

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PIRACY OF COPYRIGHTED COMPUTER SOFTWARE WILL NOT BE TOLERATED AT GROUP MEETINGS OR OTHER CLUB FUNCTIONS

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In this months issue of ESCape . . .

DBASIC for FREE?????
XL/XE and ST Library Update
MoonMist Review by Milyn King
8-BITS by Nick Kohut
PC-DITTO Early Review
ALL THE FUSS by Keith Steensma

NEXT MEETING

Several meetings ago, I had the pleasure of showing one of the neatest public domain programs that I have seen. The program was a direct implementation of the infamous television program "Wheel of Fortune". That particular version was for the ST; now it's for the XL/XE also. But I'm not going to get to show it. That privilege was 'stolen' away from me by Joe Felix. But I promised him that I would give him some in-depth pointers and playing techniques', so feel assured that he'll be 'up-to-speed' on this game.

Ever wonder where all your dollars go? Just can't seem to make sense out of that checkbook? Is the wife making all kinds of mistakes in adding 1 plus 1. Steve Davis has found the answers to the first 2 of these questions. He can't solve the last problem nor can he find more dollars for you, but he will sure be showing how to keep up with things in a little more sensible manner. Find out how he does it and still stays sane.

During the ST SIG meeting, many of us will finally get some flying lessons. Let's see now, which way to Chicago? And then which direction do I go if I wanted to get over to Denver? Steve King will demo a recent release from ANTIC that will do the job for you. THE NAVIGATOR makes getting around so much easier!

With the weather this HOT, it's hard to start thinking about football (but their doing it anyway), but it's right around the corner. Want to see the latest in football simulations? Want to make up your own plays? Want to change plans in the middle of the action? Jim Golden will challenge all comers - bar none - to a confrontation. Are there any takers out there?

Now for me, give me a sword and let me do battle against any monster that comes along. Let me hack my way down the path - slaying all the dragons as I go. Barbarian is just that kind of adventure. Ken LeGrow has taken some hints from the pros' (me!) and will show off his talents with a sword. The graphics are great and the play action is excellent. Maybe he won't get killed!

COME ON OUT AND SUPPORT YOUR CLUB.

P.S. ST-owners need to make it a point of coming out. At least 5 additional copies of DBASIC will be given away. The drawing will be by CLUB MEMBERSHIP CARD!!!! Remember to bring a CURRENT membership card with you (or see Gene Miller before the meeting; he has lots of them; pun intended).

ST-users desiring a copy (the newest version) of the DBASIC program (compliments of DTACK Grounded, Inc.) should bring a blank disk to the meeting (or be prepared to pay $2.00 to the club for a blank).

Bye and bye (and bye again), the Club has received 2 updates since the original distribution was made to everyone. Some changes have been made (the backspace key now backspaces) and two new programs have been added that will allow transferring data from and to a regular Atari TOS disk.

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XL/XE MEETING MINUTES

Well another column to do, let's see, were do I begin. Oh well, here goes.

At the last meeting of the XL/XE users, I demoed a new program from the club library by the name of "Starlords". What it is about I don't know, yet. But I am going to find out.

The way the program started, it looked like a pretty good game. The initial screen's graphics were pretty impressive. Once you get past the opening screen, the real fun begins. You are asked a series of questions, such as number of players, are any of them aliens, how many worlds, how many turns, your name and such. Once you get past this screen, you are presented another screen with different shaped ships on it. You choose one of the ships by using the joystick. Once you do this, other things happen. What, you ask, happens? I don't know! This is were my frustration really shows. After a couple of hours of fighting with the program, and a couple of hours of watching a three-year old tear up the house, I was no further into the program then the opening screen. This would be a pretty fascinating program if I knew how to use it. The program offers the ability to save your game in progress so you can come back at a later time and resume play. You can even change worlds, but how to do this, I don't know. What is the premise of the game? Apparently it is to conquer a world or worlds. A lot of work went into designing the program. The graphics are good, and what I saw of later screens was good. But how to get to these screens, I don't know. This is one instance were the documentation is a critical part of the program.

If anybody knows about this program, or knows were I can get some information on it, please let me know. I am very frustrated trying to use it.

The next person to demonstrate a program was Charles Voss. Charles presented us with a fascinating example of "Turbo-BASIC". As most of you already know, Turbo-BASIC is a very fast BASIC programming language. It offers more BASIC commands than the current BASIC language, plus a compiler and a run-time module. Turbo-BASIC runs much faster than the current BASIC. But using the compiler that comes with Turbo, you are able to compile your regular BASIC programs to give some real speed to programs. If any of you are interested in an advanced programming language, you should really look into using the new Turbo-BASIC. A unique thing about Turbo-BASIC is that it is a public domain program. The only bad thing about Turbo-BASIC is that some of the error messages show up in Dutch rather than English. This is because the program came to the U.S. from Europe.

I would highly recommend this BASIC for anybody who is doing programming. It doesn't run as fast as assembly language, but it gives the program a run for it's money.

Until next month.
Asta la Bye Bye
Joe Felix

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ST MEETING MINUTES

Minutes for the ST meeting were not available at deadline. The Club understands the importance of the family and the priorities that each of us have in our lives.

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The following disk have been added to the XL/XE Library:

XL/XE DISK #144
UTILITY & EDUCATIONAL

BOWLER.BAS: An individual bowler score keeper. Read BOWLER.DOC for complete instruction. Transfer to separate disk and rename to MENU.

BOWLER.DOC: Complete documentation for BOWLER.BAS.

BOWLER.SYS: Change name to AUTORUN.SYS. Will load BOWLER.BAS after you change BOWLER.BAS filename to MENU. All three bowler files should be transferred to a separate disk.

MATH.BAS: ANTIC JAN 87. Math Attack helps students of any age to add - subtract - multiply - and divide. It offers a choice of flash cards or a self grading test.

MATH.TLK: ANTIC JAN 87. Works with the hardware adaptation of the Atari computer explained in ANTIC.

DOORPRIZ.BAS: Winning raffle numbers are picked and displayed by the door prize program. It's just the ticket for Atari Users Group Meetings which hold monthly raffles. ANTIC JAN 87.

DOORPRIZ.TLK: Talking version of DOORPRIZE. Full documentation in ANTIC JAN. 87.

XL/XE DISK #145
GAMES

TYPETALK.TLK: ANTIC JAN 87. Program to go along with ANTIC's hardware fix to give you speech on your Atari.

REBOUND.BAS: Diabolical maze chase features flashy graphics, fast action and a typically demented storyline. Works on Atari's with 32 K memory. ANTIC JAN 87.

ROULETE.EXE: Binary file. ANTIC FEB 87. See ROULETE.DOC for instructions.

ROULETTE.DOC: Documentation for ROULETE.EXE.

FOGGER.BAS: Check the readability of your letters, reports and term papers. The San Francisco fogger analyzes your text files and measures the clarity of your writing. ANTIC FEB 87.

SLIDES.BAS: Learn to use the extra 64K memory in your 130XE.

CHARLIE.EXE: Binary file. ANTIC FEB. 87. Electric Charlie is more than just a demo of how to program a memory-resident pop up window for Atari 8-Bit computers. It automatically displays useful explanations of any error number message you might encounter while writing your own programs.

REBOKIT.BAS: Rebound Construction Kit. ANTIC FEB 87.

QUATRO.BAS: QUATRO is a colorful computerized version of Blind Man's Morris, the traditional strategy game where you beat an opponent by lining up four pieces in any direction.

XL/XE DISK #146
GAMES & UTILITIES

MULTIAUT.BAS: Multi-autorun 27 files at your fingertips. With MULTIAUT.BAS you can automatically load as many as 27 binary AUTORUN files under DOS 2 or DOS 2.5. This BASIC program works on all 8-bit Atari's. ANTIC MAR 87.

PSLABELS.BAS: Make customized Print Shop Labels with this handy little utility program written in BASIC. APRIL 87.

VECTRON.BAS: Manipulate atomic particle blasters and energy deflectors to destroy more targets than your opponent. ANTIC MARCH 87.

WORD.BAS: With WORD SEARCHER just type in the letter grid from a work-finding contest grid, give your Atari the list of words to be searched and the computer will find them in a flash. ANTIC MARCH 87.

WAGES.BAS: Wage/Hour Paymaster is a short but useful program that keeps track of your hourly wage total by week or by year. ANTIC MARCH 87.

DVORAK.BAS: Try out a version of the speed-typing Dvorak keyboard on any 8-bit Atari. This BASIC program offers an alternative to the Qwerty keyboard which was actually designed to slow down the pioneering generation of touch typists. ANTIC MAR 87.

SCREEN.BAS: Rainbow screen customizer expands the color palette of graphics 0 screens in your own programs to 24 instead of just the three colors usually available in this popular graphics mode. ANTIC MARCH 87.

The following files ending with .FNT are to be used with the PSLABELS.BAS program. They are:

MODERN.FNT
FANCY.FNT
OUTLINE.FNT
ROMAN.FNT
BACKTALK.FNT
STOP.FNT

PUZZLE1.DAT: and PUZZLE2.DAT are to be used with the WORD.BAS program.

TAXMAN.BAS: Collect your shrinking stacks of dollar bills from five secret Swiss bank accounts without running into those dangerous tax auditors. 48K. ANTIC APRIL 87.

XL/XE DISK #147
GAMES & UTILITIES

WORDFUN: BASIC version of the Wheel of Fortune guessing game. See ANTIC MAY 87 PAGE 42.

WORDFONT: Needed to operate WORDFUN. All these files with WFPZZL and WORD PLUS HELP must be placed on a separate disk.

SOUNDST.BAS: Sound Stick. From ANTIC MAY 87. Short but effective joystick controlled BASIC sound editor works on all 8-bit Atari's.

POKER.BAS: Poker machine turns your Atari into a flashy Las Vagas slot-type draw poker machine. ANTIC MAY 87.

HOP.BAS: Dot Hopper is a short fractal display program that places dots onscreen according to mathematical formulas which can be varied by the user. ANTIC MAY 87.

AROGUE.BAS: Classic mainframe dungeon adventure. ANTIC MAY 87.

SOUNDMEN.BAS: Sound demo

AROGUE.FNT: File to accompany AROGUE.BAS.

WFUN.TXT: File to accompany WORDFUN.

The following disks have been added to the ST Library:

ST DISK #46

** CKREG -
CHECK BOOK MANAGER program written by G. L. Cox (LRAA). This program is designed to keep your checkbook register. It does not claim to be a complete home tax accounting package, but does a very excellent job of keeping track of how your money is spent. The program was initially conceived to be a checkwriting program that handles most of the regular checks written each month and evolved into a combination program that writes checks and posts them to the register. All source listings are included along with a sample data file. A .DOC file is included. It is recommended that the program be moved to a separate disk before using.

** PACKV33 -
One of the new and up-coming uses for computers is in the area of amateur radio. Packet-radio is just one of these uses. This program is designed for amateur radio operators. The included .DOC is written directly for these individuals (in other words; over the heads of a good many of us common folks).

** PACMAN -
Some "old" programs just never die; they just get converted to new computers. And the same holds true for the very best of the arcade-type games. There are two versions of this game; one for the joystick and the other for the keyboard (the "K" on the name "PACMANK.BAS"). Both versions are written in GFA BASIC and require that the user load the GFA run-only program first, then select which PACMAN version to play. The programs run in LOW-REZ. The documentation is built into the program, but is written in German (?!?!?!). Anyway, who needs documentation to play PACMAN? There is an option for one or two player. Very excellent rendition; for the smaller user.

ST DISK #47

** KIDPUZZL -
There are three groups of people out there; those that can use the mouse, those of us that can't seem to get the hang of it, and those that are of the younger generation. This program applies to categories 2 and 3. This is good way to learn about the mouse. Select a puzzle number, then click on the puzzle squares and solve the puzzle. This is an excellent program for the younger generation. There is no .DOC file (but none is really required). Before using, the program files must be move to the root directory of a separate disk (makes it easier for category 2, above). Runs in LOW-REZ only.

** WHEEL2_0 -
Due to popular demand, the author of WHEEL-OF-FORTUNE has revised this great program to include a start-up program, Wheel-Of-Fortune program, puzzle editor, proof-reader, and puzzle-encoder. Many new things have been added, so read the new .DOC file that is included (it can be printed directly to a printer by double-clicking on the WHEEL2_0.DOC file). A very nice job that is worth a donation to the author. Runs in LOW-REZ only.

DISK #48

** LUNAR -
Can you qualify for the NASA space program? Can you get a lunar space craft to land on the Moon's surface without crashing? All these questions and more can be answered with this program. The game is joystick controlled and has 3 levels of difficulty. The program uses built-in directions to help you succeed. The program is nicely done. Runs in LOW-REZ only with a joystick.

** MEGABLIT -
MegaBlit is a HI-REZ paint program that works in all resolutions on all ST's. It is window based, and uses the scroll bars to move around the work area, which is many times bigger than the actual screen. It also has features not found on any paint programs. Best of all, MEGABLIT IS PUBLIC DOMAIN. MEGABLIT is file compatible with DEGAS Elite (by Tom Hudson). The program has most of the features that are desired by an artist. A very complete .DOC file is included.

** STONEDLX -
This is an enhanced version of STONE-AGE which adds many new features, including:

* Ability to Create, Save, and Load additional Screens
* Two Player games are supported
* Practice and Play mode... Play mode incorporates a timer as well as scoring
* Ability to start at any of 5 levels
* Three skill levels... Easy, Tougher, and Hard
* Willi now moves faster... hold the Joystick Button down to slow him down!
* Instructions and Help files are built-in... just press HELP KEY at Create Screen or Play Screen

A small .DOC file is included on the disk. The program runs in LOW-REZ only and uses a joystick.

ST DISK #49

** AZARIAN -
AZARIAN is a space strategy game with arcade speed. You command the LF-9 starfighter, a agile and rugged craft designed for quick attacks. Your enemy, the evil Thraxx, a lizard race that specialize in advanced organics for transport and weaponry, has spread across the galaxy and now threatens to dominate the Terran frontier. They, unfortunately, refuse negotiations... That's where you come in... The game utilizes a standard Atari-type joystick (port #2) to control the space craft. To say that the game is difficult is re-enforced by the author's comment that says the goal of the game is to "survive as long as possible".

**DEARC -
An ARC'ed file is the most efficient way to store a program file, the in this form, the program usually cannot be "run". The solution must be to de-ARC the file back to it's original form. But that can get complicated real easily. DBARC (and the accompanying ARCX.TTP file) will de-ARC all files on the disk, place the de-ARC'ed files in a folder, and then delete the original ARC'ed file - all with the double-click of the mouse. No selections to remember, no parameters to pass, no mixed-up files. A whole lot easier that the "old" way of doing it.

** STARGAME -
SPACE INVADERS revisited would be a good title for this program. The only thing is that this program seems to be twice as difficult as the original. Defending against the incoming aliens will challenge even the most brave at heart. Requires the use of a joystick plugged into port #2 of the computer.

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8-BITS

Well, it certainly was a pleasure seeing some renewed interest out of the XL/XE group during the last meeting. Along with some spirited exchange, we may have seen the emergence of a group of 8-bit users that won't be satisfied with being relegated to second grade status in our Club. Anyway, it was a beginning.

The next several months will determine if the XE/XL owners are motivated enough to organize and run our own segment of the meeting. To ensure that there is adequate representation on the Club's Board of Directors, I would like to suggest that the Club be organized a little differently than in the past - with a President and two Vice-Presidents (one each for the ST and XL/XE groups). Members-At-Large should also be selected from each group. Details like how the meetings should be run, programs, etc. will have to be worked out in the future by XL/XE owners themselves (hopefully).

If a solid core of 8-biters can be developed, some technically-oriented and specialty programs can be demonstrated that may not hold the interest of the average game player. I'd like to see us hold a swap meet where (only) public domain games and programs are traded in order to maximize each of our own personal libraries. This is one area that XL/XE owners hold an edge (because of the large number of programs available for the 8-bit machines).

Let's hear your thoughts at the next meeting - I'd like to ask Keith to set aside a period for discussion at the end of the regular program. (Since the discussion during the last meeting threatened to run all night, we promise to get everyone out by 9:00P.M. this time.)

Remember - your Club will be what you make it!

Nick Kohut

Review of the Infocom Text Adventure:

MOONMIST
by Milyn King

Awhile back, I reviewed Leather Goddesses of Phobos (LGP), finishing that review with the promise of another Infocom review once I made up my mind which one of the many Infocom products to buy. I considered my options carefully, and finally chose Moonmist!

Moonmist is an introductory level Interactive Fiction, meaning that the puzzles and mysteries found in this game are not as difficult as some of the others, and there are some clues built into the game. LGP for instance was a "standard" level, which is considered a slightly more advanced game. The Moonmist package is attractive, with a ghostly looking castle on the front, and contains a Moonmist iron on logo for a tee-shirt, a passport, as well as a nice selection of short ghost stories, two letters, and a visitors guide to Tresyllian Castle (plus of course the disk!). One very interesting facet of Moonmist is the "variation" aspect. Reading your manual, you will find that there are four variations to this game (included) one of which you choose by answering a color choice question. Each version has similarities and differences. Though the characters are the same, as well as some of the props, there are different puzzles, clues and villains (as well as solutions) for each.

Here is the background to Moonmist: You are a famous (or infamous) detective from the United States. You have received two rather disturbing letters from your friend Tamara (who you met and worked with while ridding the universe of the dreaded Leather Goddesses of Phobos) which caused you to hop on over to England and investigate her various claims of death, threatened murder, house ghost, and missing treasure! Having read the letters carefully you fear for your friends life. Since there is a ghostly presence involved, you have gotten a copy of a book titled "Legendary Ghosts of Cornwall" by Lady Lisbeth Norris, and familiarized yourself with the local spook stories on your way. Armed with your knowledge and your charm, you arrive at the gates of Tresyllian Castle just before dinner.

Once past the gates, you park your cute little british sports car, (business must be good...) and are embraced and questioned by Tamara. You are then brought inside for a round of introductions of various house guests, and of course the elderly butler. As in all good British ghost stories, the guests are an odd bunch of mixed types... perhaps harmless, perhaps psychopathic, and you are glad to be shown to your room. Chatting with the ancient servant as you unpack, you uncover some interesting information. Having found a guide book to the castle in your room, (complete with maps of the two main floors and descriptions of some of the more famous furnishings) you dress for dinner and look around a bit. Talking to the others, you find out more about a recent drowning in the castle well which Tamara had mentioned, and it seems that most of the quests also have a tale of fright to tell about the castle ghost.

Dinner is soon served, the first mysterious events occur, and you are hot on the trail of mystery!

It seems there are at least three areas of investigation: find out what the treasure is and where it is hidden; find out who the ghost is and why the castle is being "haunted", and find enough evidence to arrest the fraud; and of course, investigate the threat to Tamaras' life. During the course of your investigations, you find yourself peering into everything, finding secret passages, examining priceless art, and puzzling out many cryptic clues. You spend the night running up and down, in and out of the many rooms of the castle and the castle, itself. Others are searching, too. And then there's the ghost, who may be trying to do you in as well as Tamara.

Even though this game is not as difficult as LGP, I enjoyed it. It is a great choice for a first Interactive Fiction game, or for the slightly younger sleuth. The puzzles involved are sometimes simplistic in theory, but not necessarily easy to solve. Of course the four version ability is an asset, as after you have solved the game once, it is really fun to race around known turf, looking for clues to other puzzles involving characters and situations which are already well known. It's not as easy as it sounds even then to solve the various aspects of the new setup. The characters and descriptions of the castle itself are fun and interesting, and the theory (a ghostly castle in England, sleuthing in the dead of night...) is tried and true.

Speaking strictly about the technology of the game, as usual, Infocom is a master at Interactive Fiction. The two commands I find the most useful while playing the game are "again" which repeats the last command (a real asset when you want to follow someone all over the castle without retyping "follow...." continually) and "oops" which allows you to correct that word you misspelled in the last command without retyping the whole thing. The capability of having a short description of every new room, a description of every room (new or not) or no description is also very handy. No doubt about it, Infocom knows how to put a game together, Moonmist is a good example of their art!

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THE RUMOR MILL

There's alot of rumors out there and finding any truth in them is pretty hard, But that's what this column is for. The rumors, some good and some bad, do have merit if there's any truth to them. Through these rumors we might learn the future of our computers.

The biggest rumour is the new 65XE game system which Atari plans to release some time this Christmas. This system will include a 64K RAM console with an attachable keyboard, and game pistol. Atari will also include a 256K cartridge of flight Simulator II and Missile Command. They also said that all the games released for the new system will run on the XE and XL computers. Atari also has plans to release a new 8-bit drive the XF551. The drive is supposed to be considerably faster than the 1050 drive, and it will also be a true double density, double sided drive.

Atari isn't the only person with new things for Atari computers. Epyx for example plans to release Boulder Dash Construction Set, Spy Vs.Spy III and Artic Antics for both the XE and the ST. Timeworks has introduced Partner ST a new desk accessory that does the work of several accessories while taken up only one slot. Borderbond is releasing Art Director and Film Director which is a paint program and an animation program respectively. They also said that Print Shop is on the way for the ST for $49.95. Precision Software will release Superbase Personal Relational Database which has the ability to incorporate pictures into the database.

Big news for the ST gamers is the release of F-15 Strike Eagle this summer and the release of Gunship in the fall. Big news for the 8-bitters is XEP-80 an eighty column device and new Atari Writer+ to make use of this new device.

I plan to keep everyone informed and would also enjoy your input.

Ken LeGrow

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ALL THE FUSS

Talk about some real questions! Where's the new XL/XE software/hardware that's being rumored? What's going to happen to the system that I own? What will be happening in the coming months? Alot went on at the last meeting. Were you there? Have you made a commitment to supporting the other Club members with their problems? Yes, these are important questions. Not to me - to your fellow Club members! Ya gotta be there to know what's happening. The newsletter is fine; it'll keep you up to date. But the Club is a 2-way street. Just paying the membership dues CAN open up a vast world of resources, but it can only do that - open it up. The Club can't hand things out on the proverbial silver platter. The Club can't tell you how to play that new game, advise about the best database for your needs, or find the syntax error in your program. ONLY ANOTHER CLUB MEMBERS CAN DO THAT FOR YOU. Without Club members, the Club will be facing a real problem within the next 6 months.

So why all the fuss? Because Club members support other Club members. And if the majority of Club members need support concerning their ST-series computers, then the major efforts of the Club will be focused toward their needs. No, that doesn't mean that the focus of the Club will be only toward the ST-computer, but it might mean that the make-up of the Club newsletter and/or meeting might change. You can make a difference! Your Club membership is a good starting point, but it's not the end - only the beginning.

Consider demonstrating a program, writing a newsletter article, or at least coming to the meeting.

THEY WANT TO GIVE IT AWAY

It just seemed to good to be true! Here was a letter from a small group of hardware/software engineers saying that they wanted to give away copies of a brand new BASIC language interpreter that they had developed for the ST- computer. I had to re-read that letter again; they wanted to give it away. Aw, nobody in their right minds would send the Club a couple of copies of this new language and some 60 (fully authorized) labels to put on disks. But that's what they intended to do! Just sent them our shipping address.

Well, 2 weeks later, I got a box from DTACK Grounded, Inc. in Santa Fe, New Mexico. A couple of disks, a bunch of labels (we supply our own additional disks) and a stack of manuals were all packed into this box. The accompanying letter said to make copies of the disks, put a label on each, and give it to any Club Member who was interested in looking at the fastest, most powerful BASIC language ever developed.

So where's the catch! Nobody just gives away software! Oh, yes they do! Just pass it around (but please put a DBASIC label on the disk). But now, I didn't say there wasn't a catch. That's right, it's the book the counts. That's the part that costs money; some $39.95 (but even that seems quite reasonable for what the product is and how it works).

So what happened to all those manuals that were in the box from DTACK Grounded? Well, 5 of the manuals were given away at the last Club meeting, and at least 5 more will be given away at the next Club meeting (see NEXT MEETING notes for more info). Now don't go away - stay tuned for the continuing saga of DTACK Grounded. We'll keep you informed.

Keith Steensma

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A TRIP AROUND DBASIC

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DBASIC is a new basic language created especially for the Atari ST computers by DTACK Grounded Inc. The manual is usually what one sees first, and I was quite pleased by what I saw. The writing was clear and concise, and the manual had an overall professional appearance. The material contained in the introduction (which takes up 94 pages) is well presented, entertaining to read, and even useful for a programmer like myself. Unfortunately, those who do not possess some kind of a degree in computer science, or who have not mastered the technical side of the computer, will find the majority of the introductory material just a little too involved. That's not to say that a person who doesn't know how to program can't use the language, it just says that the manual requires more than just a little background to be entirely useful.

As far as being a language that the casual programmer would use, I would have to say that this is more than a language, and those attempting to use this language (actually, "system" is a better word) will have to brace themselves for a new experience in computer operations. The key feature that makes this a useful language is that it is fast, apparently much faster than all of the BASICs' on the market today. Unfortunately, in order to gain this speed, the developers sacrificed the useful GEM and TOS features that all of us ST users have come to enjoy. There are no icons, no mouse features, no pull down menus, and none of the user friendly extras that we are used to. Instead, we are confronted with a whole new operating system that eliminates these features that slow down other languages. Wanna know why they did that? Read the manual, under the section labelled, "How DBASIC works" (page 5).

Now, as far as the language is concerned, there are many interesting commands and features that make this a powerful language, and in my opinion (do I dare say it?), better than those that were built to replace BASIC in the first place. The old standard commands are there, such as the mathematical operators, if..then..else, loops, DATA, memory accessing, etc. What is new is that there are a few commands that are exclusive to the ST, and a few that allow us to do some really neat things with memory. For instance, one ST exclusive command is PALETTE, which allows us to set screen color and resolution at the same time. You can even tell what resolution the system is in prior to using this command by using the MODE command. Nifty, huh?! Now, as far as manipulating memory, there are the usual PEEKs and POKEs, and the CALL command, which when used correctly, can really get interesting. Since this BASIC does not re-locate itself all over memory (just trust me, and if you feel up to it, read the manual), you can set up a batch of machine code in memory, change it at will, execute it at will, and based on the results change it as necessary! How about an artificially intelligent program that modifies its own code? That's what I call powerful!

So what does all this mean? I have had the glorious opportunity to study long and hard for a degree in computers, and I chose to buy an ST when I got the chance. I did this because I saw that it was a powerful and friendly system, readily available to work or play. Now DBASIC comes along and says that user friendly is ok, but speed requires a new set of rules. It is a powerful system, and it will require learning a new operating system, but if you want to do things that have not been done before, then this may be what you have been looking for. Is it for the casual user? I'd say not, because the casual user never really needs to manipulate memory, or do millions of calculations quickly for that matter. I dare say that there is not a a casual user around that would notice the difference between the run time of a program in ST BASIC and that of the same program in DBASIC. We're talking anywhere from milliseconds to whole seconds folks! While that may be an eternity for a M68000 chip, it just isn't important to us carbon based types. Its a good language though, and it has great promise.

Jim Pfarr

I hadn't had my new 520ST but a little over a week before, somehow, I had collected 3 basics; ST BASIC, GFA BASIC, and DBASIC. Since then, I have had time to try them all and DBASIC did well considering that I am a big fan of 'GFA', and that I have only spent a total of 5 minutes with 'ST BASIC'. I am a former Atari XL owner and found that DBASIC was similar to XL BASIC; it would be a good language for a former XL owner to start with on a ST machine. In my opinion, DBASIC is a very good language, but at $39.95, the book is a little expensive. Consider that for a little more you can get 'GFA BASIC'.

Darel J. Stone

****

A new interpreted BASIC has become available for the Atari ST, challenging ST BASIC and GFA BASIC for user support by using an astonishing marketing scheme.

This new BASIC is DBASIC, from DTACK Grounded Inc. of Sante Fe, New Mexico. DTACK has distributed over 6000 manuals and licence to duplicate several tens of thousands of copies of the disk. This is in an attempt to get the BASIC into the hands of the Atari user community and build up support for it. Those who are not fortunate to get a manual can purchase a manual for $39.95. Crafty, huh?

Cute marketing aside, what do you get with DBASIC? What distinguishes it from the other currently available ST BASIC's?

Well, for one thing DBASIC does not support windows or other GEM features. In fact, it does NOT even support the TOS operating system at all. Instead, the folks at DTACK wrote their own operating environment. You do realize some advantages from this: increased disk storage due to their own formatting scheme, quicker disk access, disk formatting, fast graphics, extremely fast numerical calculations. You also get a 68000 assembler and a very well written DBASIC manual.

You load DBASIC by booting the computer with a DBASIC system disk, which brings up the complete DBASIC environment (operating system and language) at
one time. One thing that is different is that data disks contain 65k more usable storage than system disks - the difference being the room required to hold the DBASIC operating system and language.

Most of the expected "Microsoft BASIC" commands are present, with some omissions as well as several additions.

The following commands are provided in DBASIC for graphics support:

CIRSET (plot a circle)
CIRCLR (clear a circle)
LSET (plot a line)
LCLR (clear a line)
MODE (selects text/graphic mode)
PSET (plots a single point)
PCLR (clears a single point)
RECTSET (plots a rectangle)
RECTCLR (clears a rectangle)
COLOR (selects color from the current palette)
PALETTE (alters colors in the current palette)

DBASIC also offers commands that make it easy to load large blocks of data from disk to the program or vice versa.

The speed of DBASIC can be seen in almost any program, but for the sake of comparison I only recorded the time for the prime number checker program. Times previously recorded for other machines/BASIC's are also reproduced.

Atari 800XL - Atari BASIC	344.98 sec
Commodore 64 - Commodore BASIC	267.73 sec
Atari 800XL - TURBO BASIC	134.37 sec
Packard Bell ("AT" clone) 4 MHZ - GWBASIC	82.50 sec
Atari 1040ST - ST BASIC	80.20 sec
Atari 800XL - compiled TURBO BASIC	67.53 sec
Packard Bell 8 MHZ, 0 wait states - GWBASIC	46.00 sec
Atari 1040ST - GFA BASIC	9.67 sec
Atari 1040ST - compiled GFA BASIC	2.31 sec
Atari 1040ST - DBASIC	1.64 sec

DBASIC is about one-third faster than even compiled GFA BASIC, six times quicker than interpreted GFA BASIC, and a whopping fifty times faster than ST BASIC at this task. If you are into heavy number crunching, then DBASIC may represent an alternative to the promised math coprocessor board that Michtron will soon be offering (as well as several hundreds of dollars cheaper).

What then, you might ask, are the disadvantages associated with DBASIC? Strangely, most of them are associated with its' strengths. It obtains much of its' speed from bypassing TOS, which means that you cannot give a program to a friend and have him be able to run it (there is not run time only package equivalent to the GFABASRO program supplied with GFA BASIC). Also, support for the program will be fairly minimal. DTACK expects you to get updates to the program either from your friend who has just bought the program or from the local user group. Enhancements will probably not be coming out very frequently. This is understandable when you realize that DTACK has only four employees.

In the long run, only you can determine whether or not DBASIC provides the environment you wish to program in.

Randy Harrington

****

Well, I haven't written any programs. I'm no expert in programing. I'm not even at the point that I can consider myself a novice, yet. But, what I can do is know a good book, or manual, when I read one. "DBASIC for the Atari ST" is teaching me a great deal about this computer, how some of its hardware works and many of the programing terms. For instance, I just finished reading the section on Disk

Operating Systems, or DOS, and now know and can visualize how the Atari disk works. Plus, it's very interesting and, at times, comical. I'm really enjoying it! If the book reflects the quality of the language then we got a great deal here at a real good price. If you want my advice, get a hold of this book and read it!

Steve King

****

I am not a computer programmer! It's just plain and simple. But I do have a desire to learn something about the internal workings of this ST-computer. I made it through a good portion of the DBASIC manual, and much to my surprise, I learned alot. I found the author's explanation of data structures and system architecture to be very interesting and informative. Even very technical information was presented in a way and manner that made it easier to understand. What I didn't understand though was the overall negative attitude of the author toward the TOS operating system. OK, they don't think very highly of the TOS; maybe their way is better? That's fine, but the way the author keeps saying it kind of 'turned me off' after a while. All in all, I have gotten quite a bit of interesting information from the book; now I've got to sit down put that information to use. Let's see now:

```
10 PRINT "RICHARD EISNER"
20 GOTO 10
```

I wonder, is that right?

Richard Eisner

****

END OF THE LINE

****

PROTECT YOUR ST- DRIVE

In a message to all Atari Service Centers, Randy Hain (Atari Service Manager) has advised that it is a good idea to keep a disk in the ST- drive at ALL times. The diskette should not be a "scrap" disk, but not a disk with any "valuable" data on it. The plastic (or cardboard) insert that might have been inserted in the drive when the unit was delivered should NOT be used (it is suggested that this item be used to fill up your trash bag; throw it out).

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The following are new (or revised) releases for the XL/XE:

Aces of Aces from Accolade
Cycle Knight from Artworx
Infiltrator by Mindscape
Phantasie by SSI, Inc.
The Pawn by Rainbird Software
Pitfall/Demon Attack from Activision

The following are new releases for the ST- computer:

Barbarian by Psygnosis Software
AutoDuel from Lord British and Chuckles
The Guild of Thieves by Rainbird Software
221 Baker Street by Datasoft, Inc.
Mercenary (The Second City) by Datasoft, Inc.
Aliants by StarSoft Laboratories
The Sorcerer of Claymorgue Castle by Adventure Intl.
Vagas Gambler & Craps
by California Dreams
PC-Ditto by Avant Garde Software
Pha$ar by Marksman Technology
The Navigator by S. Stephenson
Quicktran by Adrian Jovanovich
Athena II by Iliad Software

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PC-DITTO
by Avant Garde

Alot of us have waited a long time for the ability to emulate various other types of computers. First one that I saw (and played with) was the Z-80/CPM emulator that Atari released. That particular program just wetted our lips. It was good and the price was right (free). Emulation can be done with moderate success; the CPM emulator proved that fact. MS.BM was the next emulator. But this IBM-PC emulator was not just a flop, it was a disaster. Now along comes a start-up company out of Florida that says that their program can emulate an IBM-PC and do it at 80% of the speed of the IBM. The program can also run software designed for the monochrome, color adapter, or extended graphics adapter. And it will support the normal printer and modem ports. It will even support the 3.5" disk format (that stores 720K on each disk) in a manner that others do as nicely. The program will work on a 520ST or 1040ST (1040ST recommended) with single-sided or double-sided drives (double-sided drives are strongly recommended). My personal opinion is that a second drive is necessary and that it should be a 5.25" drive (this will be the best way to get into the software base that is available. The only drawback is that the program will not work with a monochrome monitor (how are you going to emulate CGA, or EGA on monochrome?).

"I ain't going to get burned the second time." Well, I didn't get burned. Matter of fact, the program does everything that it is supposed to do. The program is so smooth to operate, you kind of forget that the keyboard was made by Atari instead of IBM. Sure, it's a little slow; I wouldn't consider doing heavy-duty LOTUS spreadsheets on it, but it does run LOTUS, FRAMEWORK, MicroSoft Word, MultiMate, Flight Simulator, and most of the other BIG names.

The program will be demonstrated during the combined portion of the L.R.A.A. meeting. Come on out and take a look at MY IBM.

Keith Steensma

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